



Shropshire Equality and Social Inclusion Impact Assessment (ESIIA)

Review of Customer Services Face to Face Points

Shropshire Council Part 1 ESIIA: initial screening and assessment

Please note: prompt questions and guidance within boxes are in italics. You are welcome to type over them when completing this form. Please extend the boxes if you need more space for your commentary.

Name of service change

Review of Customer Services Face to Face Points

Aims of the service change and description

This review of our Customer Service Points looks at the impact of reducing budgets and how we can continue to operate a cost-effective service across our six main customer service points located in Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Ludlow, Bridgnorth, Market Drayton and Whitchurch. The review also considers the viability of 9 smaller rural customer service points where support for customers to use self-service facilities is contracted to partner agencies and where customer footfall is now very low and in some cases non-existent.

Face to face transactions remain the most expensive way in which we can communicate with our customers. Whilst we recognise that residents use our face to face service for particular reasons, Shropshire Council needs to operate within reducing budgets and to encourage customers to carry out the same business with us using different communication channels. This will allow those who are able to take full advantage of our digital transformation of services and the development of a personal “My Shropshire” account through which transactions with the Council can be carried out. Backing this up is the continuation of a telephone customer service capable of handling high volumes of contacts cost-effectively.

We have already seen a significant reduction in the numbers of customers accessing our face to face services as people find other ways to do business with us however we continue to staff our main sites on 5 days of the week regardless of this reduced demand. Also, with very few exceptions, all of the services requested by our face to face customers can be fulfilled by telephoning the staff at our Customer Service Centre or via online application. We are therefore seeking to reduce the number of days each week where staff are on site to directly assist customers face to face so saving on costs whilst still maintaining a staff team capable of helping people where there is genuinely no alternative at present.

The reductions in customer numbers is particularly acute at the 9 smaller rural offices located in Albrighton, Broseley, Shifnal, Church Stretton (where we have 2 outlets), Cleobury Mortimer, Bishop’s Castle, Wem and Ellesmere where the number of customers is often in single figures with no customers at all using these offices in some months. In view of the costs involved in maintaining support at these offices and the low numbers of customers using them, we would look to decommission these customer service points.

Intended audiences and target groups for the service change

- Local citizens.
- Community groups.
- Delivery partners
- Local members.

Evidence used for screening of the service change

Reduction in customer demand:

The number of residents using our face to face service has been steadily falling for some years. In the last 5 years we have seen a reduction across the six main customer service points of just over 50% as shown below. Of note is the fact that 2017 and 2018 were bulk renewal years for Bus Passes where we would normally see tens of thousands more customers calling in to see us, however by automating the renewal process for the majority of eligible residents, most did not need to do anything in order to receive their new pass. It is this kind of change to services, that simplifies things for our customers, that will become more freely available as the Council develops its digital offer.

Year ended	April 2014	April 2015	April 2016	April 2017	April 2018
Customer numbers	70615	70825	52025	39229	33079

The average number of customers using these offices over a working week is as follows:

Weekday/Office	Bridgnorth	Ludlow	Market Drayton	Oswestry	Shrewsbury	Whitchurch
Monday	49	39	9	25	39	10
Tuesday	38	34	9	24	36	9
Wednesday	35	32	13	26	34	10
Thursday	32	24	9	25	32	11
Friday	38	35	10	28	37	10

The average number of customers recorded as using our smaller offices (recorded over various periods between May 2017 and April 2018) are as shown below:

Office	Average monthly number of customers
Albrighton Library	0
Bishop's Castle Library	2
Broseley Library	2
Church Stretton Town Council	28
Church Stretton Health and Wellbeing Centre	3
Cleobury Country Library	0
Ellesmere Day Centre	No returns received
Shifnal Library	8
Wem	37

The rationale for the proposal to reduce staffed opening times at our main sites and to decommission our smaller sites is the fact that the same services are available via other channels that let us use our resources much more sustainably.

Evidence supports the fact that more people are accessing our services online and whilst we fully expect many Shropshire residents of all age groups will welcome improvements to our digital services we recognise that not everyone will be confident in or capable of carrying out transactions in this way.

Our customer service points are equipped with public computers for those able to manage online business. For those customers not able or confident enough to use online services we also provide free to use public telephones that are linked to our Customer Service Centre and to other popular services therefore giving direct contact with an adviser.

Evidence from public consultation suggests that the face to face service is used by older residents as their preferred channel of conducting business with the Council. After Housing Benefit, the most popular service requests received at face to face – Blue Badge enquiries, Environmental Maintenance reporting and Waste issues, would support this view. However there is also evidence of these same services being accessed in much greater volume by a very wide age range of residents via the Customer Service Centre (telephony centre).

The Customer Service Centre (CSC) provides help with a very wide range of services and its opening times (8am to 6pm Monday to Friday, 9am to 1pm on Saturdays and has 24 hour cover for emergency issues) exceed those of any face to face office. We still therefore provide a very good service to our customers of all age ranges, but simply via a different channel. Given the rurality of our County, many customers already choose the telephone as their preferred method of contact which is borne out by the supporting statistics. The CSC is geared to handling high levels of contact cost effectively: in under one and a half months it will handle the same number of enquiries as face to face will see in a full year.

Further, the CSC is able to provide seamless access to or direct support from Adult Social Care and safeguarding, Children’s Services, homelessness and Welfare Reform Support thus anyone contacting the Council through the CSC may take additional advantage of this wider support not ordinarily available face to face.

Therefore we believe that supporting a reduced face to face service through a combination of existing (and improving) digital services backed up by efficient and effective contact centre support forms a reasonable and more sustainable offer to our customers that is unilaterally available to Shropshire residents regardless of their geographical location or isolation.

Specific consultation and engagement with intended audiences and target groups for the service change

Local consultation carried out interactively at each Customer Service Point and via the Council’s online Portal. Town Councils and partner provider organisations particularly welfare reform partners invited to participate.

Potential impact on Protected Characteristic groups and on social inclusion

High Negative	Significant potential impact, risk of exposure, history of complaints, no mitigating measures in place or no evidence available: urgent need for consultation with customers, general public, workforce
Medium Negative	Some potential impact, some mitigating measures in place but no evidence available how effective they are: would be beneficial to consult with customers, general public, workforce
Low Negative	Almost bordering on non-relevance to the ESIIA process (heavily legislation led, very little discretion can be exercised, limited public facing aspect, national policy affecting degree of local impact possible)

Initial assessment for each group

Please rate the impact that you perceive the service change is likely to have on a group, through inserting a tick in the relevant column.

Protected Characteristic groups and other groups in Shropshire	High negative impact <i>Part Two ESIIA required</i>	High positive impact <i>Part One ESIIA required</i>	Medium positive or negative impact <i>Part One ESIIA required</i>	Low positive or negative impact <i>Part One ESIIA required</i>
Age (please include children, young people, people of working age, older people. Some people may belong to more than one group eg young person with disability)				✓
Disability (please include: mental health conditions and syndromes including autism; physical disabilities or impairments; learning disabilities; Multiple Sclerosis; cancer; HIV)				✓
Gender re-assignment (please include associated aspects: safety, caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)				No evidence to suggest either positive or negative impact
Marriage and Civil Partnership (please include associated aspects: caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)				No evidence to suggest either positive or negative impact
Pregnancy & Maternity (please include associated aspects: safety, caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)				✓
Race (please include: ethnicity, nationality, culture, language, gypsy, traveller)				No evidence to suggest either positive or negative impact
Religion and belief (please include: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Non)				No evidence to suggest either positive or negative impact

conformists; Rastafarianism; Sikhism, Shinto, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, and any others)				
Sex (please include associated aspects: safety, caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)				No evidence to suggest either positive or negative impact
Sexual Orientation (please include associated aspects: safety; caring responsibility; potential for bullying and harassment)				No evidence to suggest either positive or negative impact
Other: Social Inclusion (please include families and friends with caring responsibilities; people with health inequalities; households in poverty; refugees and asylum seekers; rural communities; people you consider to be vulnerable)			✓	

Decision, review and monitoring

Decision	Yes	No
Part One ESIIA Only?	✓	
Proceed to Part Two Full Report?		✓

If Part One, please now use the boxes below and sign off at the foot of the page. If Part Two, please move on to the full report stage.

Actions to mitigate negative impact or enhance positive impact of the service change
<p>Shropshire’s rurality is an issue for consideration in this impact assessment however it can be argued that many of our outlying areas are already not immediately served by either the number or locations of our existing customer service points.</p> <p>The development of an efficient, available online and telephony service capable of fulfilling customer requests as simply as possible remains a solution that is more unilaterally available to our residents as well as being more financially sustainable.</p> <p>As stated above, our Customer Service Centre retains long opening hours and provides access to a wide range of services for customers unable to use online facilities. We are improving our online experience through the Digital Transformation Programme which aims to simplify many of the processes that customers are obliged to follow to fulfil service requests. Redesigning services to be as simple as possible will also help our telephony advisers to help customers who contact us by telephone, adding value to the call which in many cases will resolve the customer’s needs.</p> <p>The retention of some directly staffed days at the 6 main customer points has been considered in the light of the numbers of customers still using the face to face service and the feedback and comments received during consultation.</p> <p>Based upon numbers using the service across these sites (which have fallen by another 18% over the year since consultation took place), having staff on site to help on the days</p>

suggested would mean them seeing between 4 and 6 customers per hour, meaning on average between 10 and 15 minutes each to handle their enquiries.

Access to our self-service equipment in these sites will still be available across the full week's opening times. Where customers are not able to go online, keeping self-serve phones available means that anyone who needs to speak to an adviser instead can still do so.

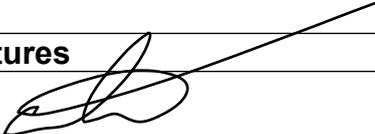
We have approached the partners who run our smaller offices for us to ask if they will keep our self-serve equipment, which we will maintain, so that there is still local access.

We are also working with our IT Department to improve how our self-service computers work so that more can be done through these and so that advisers working in our customer Service Centre can help those customers less able or less confident in using online services, by talking them through what to do or by taking over the computer remotely to help instruct customers. We will work with services to ensure that the alternative ways of doing business with them are promoted especially the Revenues and Benefits Service which forms the bulk of face to face service requests.

Actions to review and monitor the impact of the service change

Comments, compliments and complaints process will be monitored, regular service reviews scheduled

Scrutiny at Part One screening stage

People involved	Signatures	Date
<i>Lead officer carrying out the screening</i>		17 December 2018
<i>Any internal support</i>	Mrs Lois Dale, Principal Rural Policy Officer; ext 5684	
<i>Any external support</i>		
<i>Head of service</i>		

Sign off at Part One screening stage

Name	Signatures	Date
<i>Lead officer's name</i>		
<i>Head of service's name</i>		

Shropshire Council Part 2 ESIIA: full report

Guidance notes on how to carry out the full report

The decision that you are seeking to make, as a result of carrying out this full report, will take one of four routes:

1. To make changes to satisfy any concerns raised through the specific consultation and engagement process and through your further analysis of the evidence to hand;
2. To make changes that will remove or reduce the potential of the service change to adversely affect any of the Protected Characteristic groups and those who may be at risk of social exclusion;
3. To adopt the service change as it stands, with evidence to justify your decision even though it could adversely affect some groups;
4. To find alternative means to achieve the aims of the service change.

The Part Two Full Report therefore starts with a forensic scrutiny of the evidence and consultation results considered during Part One Screening, and identification of gaps in data for people in any of the nine Protected Characteristic groups and people who may be at risk of social exclusion, eg rural communities. There may also be gaps identified to you independently of this process, from sources including the intended audiences and target groups themselves.

The forensic scrutiny stage enables you to assess:

- **Which gaps need to be filled right now, to help you to make a decision about the likely impact of the proposed service change?**

This could involve methods such as: one off service area focus groups; use of customer records; examination of data held elsewhere in the organisation, such as corporate customer complaints; and reference to data held by similar authorities or at national level from which reliable comparisons might be drawn, including via the Rural Services Network. Quantitative evidence could include data from NHS Foundation Trusts, community and voluntary sector bodies, and partnerships including the Local Enterprise Partnership and the Health and Well Being Board. Qualitative evidence could include commentary from stakeholders.

- **Which gaps could be filled within a timeframe that will enable you to monitor potential barriers and any positive or negative impacts on groups and individuals further along into the process?**

This could potentially be as part of wider corporate and partnership efforts to strengthen the evidence base on equalities. Examples would be: joint information sharing protocols about victims of hate crime incidents; the collection of data that will fill gaps across a number of service areas, eg needs of young people with learning disabilities as they progress through into independent living; and publicity awareness campaigns that encourage open feedback and suggestions from a variety of audiences.

Once you have identified your evidence gaps, and decided on the actions you will take right now and further into the process, please record your activity in the following boxes. Please extend the boxes as needed.

Evidence used for assessment of the service change: activity record

How did you carry out further research into the nine Protected Characteristic groups and those who may be at risk of social exclusion, about their current needs and aspirations and about the likely impacts and barriers that they face in day to day living?

And what did it tell you?

Specific consultation and engagement with intended audiences and target groups for the service change: activity record

How did you carry out further specific consultation and engagement activity with the intended audiences and with other stakeholders who may be affected by the service change?

And what did it tell you?

Further and ongoing research and consultation with intended audiences and target groups for the service change: activity record

What further research, consultation and engagement activity do you think is required to help fill gaps in our understanding about the potential or known affect that this proposed service change may have on any of the ten groupings and on the intended audiences and target groups? This could be by your service area and/or at corporate and partnership level.

Full report assessment for each group

Please rate the impact as you now perceive it, by inserting a tick. Please give brief comments for each group, to give context to your decision, including what barriers these groups or individual may face.

Protected Characteristic groups and other groups in Shropshire	High negative impact	High positive impact	Medium positive or negative impact	Low positive or negative impact
Age (please include children, young people, people of working age, older people. Some people may belong to more than one group eg young person with disability)				
Disability (please include: mental health conditions and syndromes including autism; physical disabilities or impairments; learning disabilities; Multiple Sclerosis; cancer; HIV)				
Gender re-assignment (please include associated aspects: safety, caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)				
Marriage and Civil Partnership (please include associated aspects: caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)				
Pregnancy & Maternity (please include associated aspects: safety, caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)				
Race (please include: ethnicity, nationality, culture, language, gypsy, traveller)				
Religion and belief (please include: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Non conformists; Rastafarianism; Sikhism, Shinto, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, and any others)				
Sex (please include associated aspects: safety, caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)				
Sexual Orientation (please include associated aspects: safety; caring responsibility; potential for bullying and harassment)				
Other: Social Inclusion (please include families and friends with caring responsibilities; people with health inequalities; households in poverty; refugees and asylum seekers; rural communities; people you consider to be vulnerable)				

Summary of findings and analysis - ESIIA decision

You should now be in a position to record your decision. Please highlight in bold the route that you have decided to take.

1. To make changes to satisfy any concerns raised through the specific consultation and engagement process and through your further analysis of the evidence to hand;
2. To make changes that will remove or reduce the potential of the service change to adversely affect any of the Protected Characteristic groups and those who may be at risk of social exclusion;
3. To adopt the service change as it stands, with evidence to justify your decision even though it could adversely affect some groups;
4. To find alternative means to achieve the aims of the service change.

Please add any brief overall comments to explain your choice.

You will then need to create an action plan and attach it to this report, to set out what further activity is taking place or is programmed that will:

- *mitigate negative impact or enhance positive impact of the service change,*
- AND**
- *review and monitor the impact of the service change*

Please try to ensure that:

- *Your decision is based on the aims of the service change, the evidence collected, consultation and engagement results, relative merits of alternative approaches and compliance with legislation, and that records are kept;*
- *The action plan shows clear links to corporate actions the Council is taking to meet the general equality duty placed on us by the Equality Act 2010, to have due regard to the three equality aims in our decision making processes.*

Scrutiny at Part Two full report stage

People involved	Signatures	Date
<i>Lead officer</i>		
<i>Any internal support</i>		
<i>Any external support</i>		
<i>Head of service</i>		

Sign off at Part Two full report stage

Signature (Lead Officer)	Signature (Head of Service)
Date:	Date:

Appendix: ESIIA Part Two Full Report: Guidance Notes on Action Plan

Please base your action plan on the evidence you find to support your decisions, and the challenges and opportunities you have identified. It could include arrangements for:

- continuing engagement and involvement with intended audiences, target groups and stakeholders;
- monitoring and evaluating the service change for its impact on different groups throughout the process and as the service change is carried out;
- ensuring that any pilot projects are evaluated and take account of issues described in the assessment, and that they are assessed to make sure they are having intended impact;
- ensuring that relevant colleagues are made aware of the assessment;
- disseminating information about the assessment to all relevant stakeholders who will be implementing the service change;
- strengthening the evidence base on equalities.

Please also consider:

- resource implications for in-house and external delivery of the service;
- arrangements for ensuring that external providers of the service are monitored for compliance with the Council's commitments to equality, diversity and social inclusion, and legal requirements including duties under the Equality Act 2010.

And finally, please also ensure that the action plan shows clear links to corporate actions the Council is taking to meet the general equality duty placed on us by the Equality Act 2010, to have due regard to the three equality aims in our decision making processes.

These are:

- Eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advancing equality of opportunity
- Fostering good relations

Note for 2014 refresh of our corporate equality impact assessment approach: Shropshire Council has referred to good practice elsewhere in refreshing the EINA material and replacing it with this ESIIA material. The Council is grateful in particular to Leicestershire County Council, for graciously allowing use to be made of their Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments (EHRIAs) material and associated documentation.

For further information on the use of ESIIAs: please contact your head of service or contact Mrs Lois Dale, Principal Rural Policy Officer and internal policy support on equality, via telephone 01743 255667, or email lois.dale@shropshire.gov.uk.